

# John Alden's Summer Place Found in Duxbury

By LOIS DANIELS

Probably one of the first Summer resorts in the New World has just been discovered by a Lincoln "pick and shovel historian."

Roland M. Robbins, 52-year-old, self-taught archeologist whose specialty is finding lost Americana, thinks he has discovered the exact location of the original John Alden House in Duxbury.

The site is about 100 feet east of the spot where John and Priscilla Alden's first Duxbury home was originally thought to be. Plymouth Colony records show that the Alden house was not built until 1632, but there is evidence that the family summered there as early as 1627, making it one of the first summering spots on the South Shore.

Formerly a house painter and window washer, Robbins turned to full-time digging in 1948. From his probings he has already disproved one theory. According to a Nov. 22, 1907 Globe clipping, citizens of Duxbury commonly believed (and did until recently) that the original John Alden house was destroyed by fire. But Robbins has proved that it wasn't. He has found no traces whatsoever of charcoal on the site.

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Robbins discovered the original foundations by means of a self-designed T-shaped probing rod. He rams the rod into the earth and can tell by means of the vibrations whether he has struck rock, wood, crockery or other substance.

The general width of the foundation is 2 feet. The house was originally 38 feet long—the same dimensions as the 307-year-old dwelling built by Jonathan, John's third son (but first to be born in Duxbury). The present John Alden House attracts thousands of visitors to



**PROBING** the site of the original John Alden House is Roland W. Robbins, the "pick and shovel historian" from Lincoln. By ramming the self-designed T-shaped steel rod into the ground, Robbins can tell from the vibrations whether he's struck stone, wood or crockery.

New England every Summer. It is generally believed that the timbers in the house that Jonathan built are from the first Alden dwelling.

The spot where Robbins has been digging and probing for the past few months lies just south of the school property off Alden st. With construction of a school going on, the town has been stripping the land for a playground. But

luckily the corner of the house lies just a few feet from where they were stripping. "Just think how close we came from losing a national historic site," said Mrs. Helen D. Bailey, director of the John Alden House.

Robbins also has recovered many of what he calls "archeological bonuses. Artifacts are merely supplements to our

diggings, but they are very rewarding because they give us the basic outline of the early settler's way of life," he said.

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Fewer than seven feet under ground, Robbins found 150 hand-made square nails, earthenware, a gun flint, a buckle fragment, a fish hook and a 1652 New England silver coin. Also more than 100 pieces of thin diamond-shaped window glass, four fragments of clay pipe stems and one fragment of a pipe bowl.

Robbins said he is having the artifacts checked by the top authorities in the country.

Benjamin Ginsberg of Ginsberg and Levy, Inc., New York, has said that the turquoise English tin enameled earthenware which Robbins recovered is "definitely 17th century, possibly much earlier." He describes the buckle fragment as "17th century style."

William Clark, curator of the Numismatic Society, said that the silver sixpence is "relatively rare, yet worth only about \$25."

"The value money-wise is very little," said Robbins. "But you couldn't buy the history of the community contained in them."

John Hull operated the first New World mint in Duxbury from 1652 to 1682. It is very likely, says Clark, that this 1652 coin is one of the first ones struck.

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All of the artifacts were removed from within the site of the foundation and are most likely the ones which John and Priscilla used themselves. They will stay at the Alden House and become the property of the Alden Kindred of America. If that organization should go out of existence,



**HOUSE THAT JACK BUILT**—The John Alden House built by Jonathan, third son of John and Priscilla Alden, in 1653. Jonathan was the first son born in Duxbury.

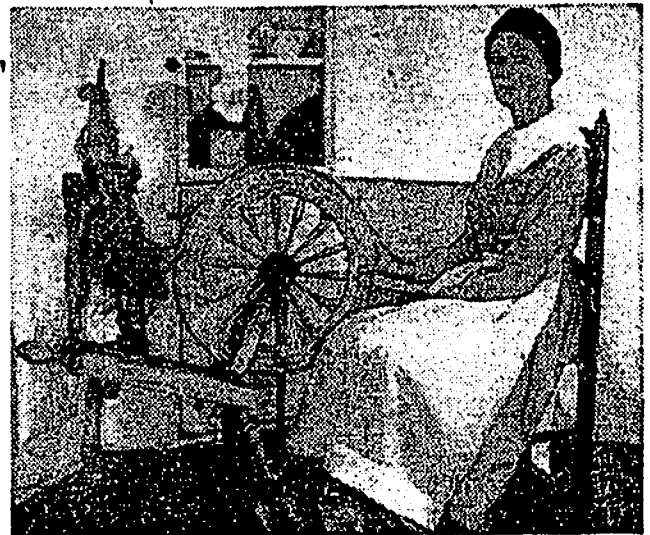


**RECOVERED**—Seventeenth Century artifacts found by archaeologist Roland W. Robbins at the site of the original John Alden home in Duxbury.

they will pass to the Duxbury local history for a number of years. He was the one who called Robbins to verify the authenticity of the site. The society chose Robbins for the job because of his previous successes. His finds include the foundations of the Thoreau



**ROCKING THE CRADLE**—June Anderson in typical Pilgrim dress is shown in the Great Room of the John Alden House.



**SPINNING YARN**—Sheila Andrews shown by a 17th century spinning wheel.

cabin at Walden-Pond and Thomas Jefferson's first home near Charlottesville, Va. Both Edwards and the rest of the Alden Kindred hope that the spot will be taken over as a national historic site. After all, it's the location of the home of the man "who spoke for himself" and then married Priscilla. Both romantically and historically it serves as a reminder of our glorious heritage.